Flying high: Aircraft Operations wins division award

By Kendra Ceule

Every day JSC's Aircraft Operations Division goes above and beyond expectations, and that effort was recently recognized by the General Services Administration. GSA awarded AOD its prestigious Federal Aviation Award in September.

"The award recognizes best practices, and an efficient and effective use of the federal government's fleet," said GSA's Mike Miles. Miles said that AOD "just rose to the top" of the competition.

AOD earned the award with its efficiency, proactive thinking and impressive safety record – the division has not had a major safety mishap in 20 years.

The award, now in its second year, is judged by a team of aviation leaders. The judges represent such organizations as the Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association and the National Business Aviation Association, as well as management, budget and safety groups.

"It was a team award," said Bob Naughton, AOD's Chief. Naughton, who himself was given a prestigious honorable mention for his work as the Division Chief, said that the award "reflects the dedication and professionalism of very special people on the AOD team."

Working as one team

Naughton has been with AOD for 13 years, having started as a Deputy before becoming its Chief. He not only manages AOD's workforce of nearly 400, but has also been the Chairman of the NASA Intercenter Aircraft Advisory Panel for the past five years. This panel manages NASA's aircraft programs and operations. During his tenure, Naughton has guided the Agency through a NASA-wide aircraft operations realignment.

"I'm very grateful that I have Bob running AOD," said Dr. Steven Hawley, Director of Flight Crew Operations. AOD is a part of the Flight Crew Operations Directorate.

Naughton said he wanted to create a positive, proactive and safe work environment at AOD. "It's been my goal to make AOD a great place for good people to work," he said. "Everyone has a can-do spirit, and I'm kinda proud of that."

Teamwork is also an important part of Naughton's AOD. "Bob fosters an environment where civil servants and contractors are part of one team," said Hawley. "He spreads the idea that no matter what goal you're working toward, you can only accomplish it if you work as a team."

For example, Naughton made sure that AOD's contract companies were recognized and included in the division's award.

NASA JSC 2002e Photo by James Blair

Bob Naughton, Chief of the Aircraft Operations Division, accepts the Federal Aviation Award at General Services Administration Headquarters in Washington, D.C.

Getting the job done

"We have some super contractors," said Naughton. He cited the excellent way that the Shuttle Training Aircraft (STA) can replicate a certain shuttle in specific weather conditions - it's work done by AOD contract employees.

Astronaut Dom Gorie said he was pleased with the preparation he was given by his STA training. "When I faced adverse weather conditions in my approach to the Cape," said Gorie, "I felt comfortable because the shuttle flew just like the STA. Boy, was I thankful."

Astronaut training, like that done with STAs, is AOD's primary mission, but not its only one. AOD is also responsible for supporting the Space Shuttle and Space Station Programs in many ways – such as ferrying the space shuttle aboard the Shuttle Carrier Aircraft, transporting spaceflight cargo in the "Super Guppy" and providing opportunities for reduced-gravity research in the KC-135.

"Every plane we fly is unique in some way," said Hawley. "There's a special kind of care involved in operating such unique aircraft."

For example, when there was a recent brake problem with the T-38Ns, the AOD team went beyond typical maintenance procedures. "Usually in a situation like that," said Hawley, "there's a tendency to discard the broken part, replace it and move on. Our guys don't work that way."

Instead, AOD employees looked deeper and found an inherent flaw in the plane's brake design, then devised a more permanent solution. The planes' ejector seats are also being adapted to better serve the astronaut corps, and the Air Force has since been convinced to modify its T-38Ns in the same way.

AOD's attention to detail and concern for safety put astronaut trainees at ease, said Hawley, who flew in five space shuttle missions before accepting his current post.

"It gives you a good feeling as a crewmember to know that those planes are better maintained than any other planes in the world," he said.

Naughton said he is proud of his team's safety record, but also of the work that it gets done every day. "There's a healthy balance between being safe and getting the mission done," he said.

AOD benefits from having pilots serve as its safety experts, so that they more fully understand the situations at hand and can work toward solutions. "Flying is inherently dangerous," Naughton said, "but we mitigate as much risk as possible with experience." ❖

Presidential Management Intern Program has history of excellence

By Kendra Ceule

It's been around for 25 years, but you may not have heard of it. Someone in your office may be a part of it. Even NASA Administrator Sean O'Keefe did it.

What is it?

It's the Presidential Management Intern (PMI) Program.

"The PMI program is a well-kept secret," said Kendra Perkins, former Johnson Space Center PMI. Perkins has recently completed her two-year PMI internship and now works in the External Relations Office within the Office of Public Affairs.

One reason that the program is not well known is that there are relatively few interns selected – applicants from all over the country vie for just a few hundred internships each year. Perkins, along with Anne Roemer of JSC's Education Branch, is part of the PMI class of 2000. The other members of their class are now dispersed all over the country, working in government agencies.

NASA JSC 2002e41928
Photo by Robert Markowitz

Anne Roemer works in JSC's Education Branch.

PMI is geared toward master- or doctorate-level graduates interested in a career with the federal government. The program was established in 1977 with a Presidential Executive Order to attract such individuals, from various academic areas, into careers in public policy.

Perkins applied for the program in the final year of her Master of Public Policy Program at Harvard University's John F. Kennedy School of Government. Roemer came to PMI by way of the University of Denver's Graduate School of International Studies, where she earned her master's in International Administration.

After going through a rigorous application process – first at their graduate schools, then with the PMI program – the PMIs are selected and placed with a federal agency of their choice.

Then, following an orientation period, the new interns begin their two years of federal service – during which they rotate at least once to a different center within their agency, or to a different role within one center. After two years, interns may have the chance to start a career with their agency.

Roemer's and Perkins' internships ended in August, and they now have careers at JSC. Perkins began in the ISS Resources Management Office. She then worked in the Space and Life Sciences Resources Management Office, and is finishing up her internship at her current post in PAO. Perkins said she has enjoyed rotating around the Center.

"The flexibility that the PMI program provides," she said, "is a tremendous benefit because it allowed me to see and experience JSC from many different perspectives."

Roemer began her internship in the JSC Education and Student Programs Office. She then spent four months at NASA Headquarters and is now back at JSC in Education.

"It's given me exposure to areas that otherwise I wouldn't have seen," she said of her PMI experience, "and it was a great opportunity to spend time at Headquarters so early in my career."

In addition to their regular work, the two were also required to complete at least 80 hours of training during each year of their internship – a requirement that Perkins and Roemer didn't mind.

NASA JSC 2002e41928
Photo by Robert Markowitz

Kendra Perkins works in the External Relations Office within Public Affairs.

"Everyone has the opportunity to take that training, but PMI requires it," said Roemer, who said she benefited from classes in leadership and project management, among others. Perkins said the training is "perhaps the best thing about the PMI program" and that it complemented her career development well.

Another benefit of the PMI program lies in the contacts made. Perkins has worked to establish a nationwide network of PMIs through a PMI career development group, and both interns have benefited from the experience of former PMIs who now work at JSC.

One former PMI now leads NASA – Administrator O'Keefe was in the very first PMI class. There's no telling how high the program will carry today's interns. For now, Perkins and Roemer are focusing on the near future. They are getting the most out of their time at JSC, and looking forward to attending their PMI graduation in December in Washington, D.C. ❖